

# 10 Strategies for Learning Games That Work

From quizzing to types of multiplayer interaction, take inspiration from these consumer-grade games to tap into learners' motivation and increase learning engagement.

# Why Use Games in Learning?

Chances are, the majority of your learners will have interacted with games outside of the workplace, whether simple phone games, Zoom quizzes, or more complex games on PC or consoles (known as commercial games).

This means they'll likely be familiar with the mechanics you use to design your game(s). And what's more, that familiarity will contribute to engagement with the learning program. Learning games and commercial game mechanics are valuable tools for increasing engagement with your learning initiatives as well as improving information retention and knowledge transfer.

This cheat sheet will talk you through some of our favorite commercial game mechanics, explain how they can be incorporated into your learning, and why they're so effective.



# 10

## Strategies for Learning Games (at a glance)

- Quizzes
- Scenarios
- Puzzles
- Strategy
- Highly replayable
- Never-ending
- Inevitable failure
- Multiplayer – competitive
- Multiplayer – collaborative
- Multiplayer – competitive and collaborative

We'll now look at each of these in more detail and how they can be used in a learning context, and examples of each gaming concept from real commercial games.

# 10

## Strategies for Learning Games (in more detail)

Alongside the descriptions of each of these concepts, we've provided examples of commercial games as well as a trailer to give you an idea of the gameplay in action.



### Quizzes

One of the most frequently used types of gameplay, quizzes are intuitive to play and come with an inherent sense of competition. Any type of competition, especially against those we know (such as co-workers), taps into our intrinsic motivation and improves engagement with the learning.

Perhaps the most popular form of this is the classic quiz over Zoom (or in a pub in the UK) where people play in teams, but TV shows such as Jeopardy and The Chase make use of solo quizzing dynamics. They can be delivered live or asynchronously and primarily serve the purpose of testing knowledge. This makes them ideal for assessment segments within eLearning modules or as a standalone gameplay function within a learning program.

**Commercial game example:** [Knowledge is Power](#) (PS4).

## 2

## Scenarios

Scenario-based challenges have become incredibly popular among a wide range of learning content. They encourage learners to solve dilemmas through critical thinking, problem solving, and quick reactions. Critically, they allow players to make choices and deal with the consequences in a safe environment.

Scenarios can either be specific to the learners' job role/workplace or they can be dramatized stories, as long as they're logical. The use of scenarios in learning games encourages experimentation and adaptability. Alongside scenario-based learning, we can also look at decision-based narratives where the decisions a player makes at any point will impact the storyline or content. These are known as branching scenarios.

Commercial game example: [Firewatch](#) (cross platform)

## 3

## Puzzles

Puzzles focus primarily on problem solving. Problem solving is a highly sought-after soft skill, so the great thing about using puzzles as part of your learning gameplay mechanics is that as well as teaching your learners the relevant content, they also get a chance to practice and expand their problem-solving skills.

Puzzles must include a clear goal, rules, and tools to navigate the game. The best puzzle games supply simple mechanics that meet increasingly complex challenges. This creates a sense of enjoyable frustration with the game that can encourage further engagement until the problem presented is solved and/or the player can move on to the next stage.

Commercial game example: [Portal](#) (cross platform)



## 4

### Strategy

Strategy games are easy to pick up but hard to master. They require patience and skill as there are many different ways to succeed and fail at each stage. Strategy games are great for engagement as they encourage return visits and have a high level of replayability.

These types of games encourage critical thinking and forward planning, which are also great skills to be teaching your employees. While they're typically larger in scale than many of the other game types mentioned here, they bring many rewards in terms of engagement, skill-building, and competition.

**Commercial game example:** [Civilization](#) (PC)

## 5

### Highly Replayable

Highly replayable games have enough complexity in them to encourage multiple playthroughs. This can mean there are more ways to achieve the same goals, more achievements to find, or an entirely different way of navigating the game. These encourage a high level of engagement, experimentation, and creativity.

As with many scenario-based games, they provide lots of ways to succeed or fail, which can lead to different experiences each time they're played. These techniques can be employed particularly well in learning games that cover topics like product knowledge, which may continue to expand over time as new products are introduced.

**Commercial game example:** [Grand Theft Auto V](#) (cross platform)

## 6

### Never-Ending

An emerging trend in game design is to create two 'levels' of gameplay: the first is where the player completes missions to gain resources, and the second is a sandbox environment where players spend their resources to build something.

For example in Stardew Valley players spend the day exploring the world and foraging for seeds and other materials, then return to their home base where they work on improving the scale and efficiency of their farm. In these games, the player sets their own goals and creates their own stories, which means they remain engaged in the long term. The focus is on the gameplay itself, rather than a pre-defined story or narrative.

Engagement and interest are maintained through features like achievements, collectibles, and complexity. Never-ending games can come with optional objectives, so while it may essentially be a sandbox game, there are things to collect or tasks to complete along the way. This can be a useful strategy to drive towards self-directed learning as it taps into the brain's tendency to focus on novelty as well as maintaining long-term engagement.

**Commercial game example:** [Stardew Valley](#) (PC)

## 7

### Inevitable Failure

Failure is one of the most important ways that we learn. Feedback loops and consistent mistakes, while frustrating, can provide fantastic gateways to learning. Games that use the inevitable failure concept tend to have very short gameplay loops with each play session lasting a few minutes at most.

Players learn every time they fail and do better each time. Because of this, the reward becomes associated with progression rather than completion. Gameplay like this encourages critical thinking, fast reactions, and repeated learning from mistakes. It can help to embed behavior into muscle memory and improve reflexes.

**Commercial game example:** [Jetpack Joyride](#) (iOS/Android)

## 8

### Multiplayer – Competitive



Competitive multiplayer is one of the most popular forms of consumer-grade games on the market, especially for those who play predominantly on consoles. Competing against others increases motivation and engagement with the game, often leading to longer playtimes.

Multiplayer competitive games come with a number of different layout options that are all worth considering for your learning game design. For example, there are the 1 vs 1, team vs team, and 1 vs many options. Other variations include whether the player is competing against humans or AI, as this changes the complexity of the gameplay. Additionally, the game can be played against components in the same room or live online.

Commercial game example: [Super Smash Bros. Ultimate](#) (Nintendo Switch)

## 9

### Multiplayer – Collaborative



During a period of prolonged social separation, online multiplayer collaborative games surged in popularity. They can be played live online or asynchronously and can be played digitally or in-person. These types of games encourage creativity and communication skills through shared sense-making and team building.

Collaborative games give players the opportunity to learn from and teach others across individual strengths and weaknesses. In this sense, these types of games can do a lot to help build soft skills as well as tackle the content within the learning. The flexibility of these types of collaborative games means that they can be brought into distance learning and in-person learning environments.

Commercial game example: [Animal Crossing: New Horizons](#) (Nintendo Switch)

# 10

## Multiplayer – Competitive and Collaborative

This is where the magic happens! The combination of competitive and collaborative brings in the best of both types of games. The teamwork and communication skills required in collaboration meet the critical thinking and motivation brought through competition as players work together to defeat another team.

This type of game is great for engagement through a joint enterprise and achieving a shared goal. It can also create deep interpersonal sense-making experiences and creates a number of great opportunities for social learning. We have found this to be one of the most effective types of strategic gameplay to introduce in a learning context.

**Commercial game example:** [Overwatch](#) (cross platform)



**Want to see a learning game in action?**

Take a look at the work we did with [Invesco QQQ](#) and the hybrid learning program we created for [Reckitt](#).



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